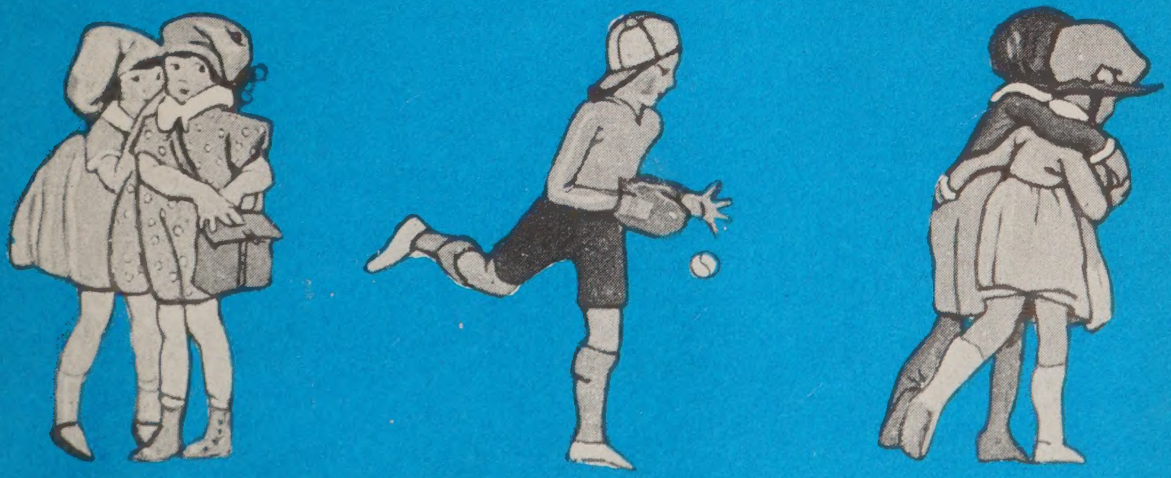
GOOD HABITS FOR CHILDREN

Prepared with the cooperation and advice of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene



METROPOLITAN LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY

Pacific Coast Head Office
San Francisco

HOME OFFICE
NEW YORK

Canadian Head Office
Ottawa

WELLCOME
LIBRARY
General Collections
P
5272
22502901991

GOOD HABITS FOR CHILDREN

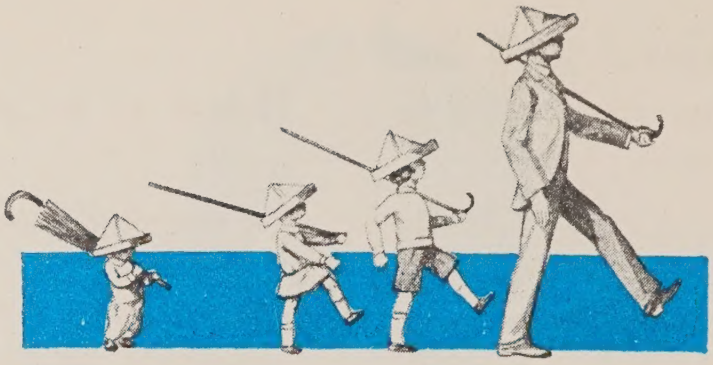
METROPOLITAN LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
HOME OFFICE: NEW YORK
Pacific Coast Head Office: San Francisco
Canadian Head Office: Ottawa

FOR MUCH of the material in this pamphlet we are indebted to that excellent publication of The National Committee for Mental Hygiene, entitled *Habit Training for Children*, which was prepared by the Division of Mental Hygiene of the Massachusetts Department of Mental Diseases, under the direction of Dr. Douglas A. Thom and other members of his staff.

GOOD HABITS FOR CHILDREN

THE TASK of childhood is to form good habits. A child learns through much effort the habit of balancing himself on his two feet, of putting one foot in front of the other, of shaping his lips and placing his tongue in certain ways to form sounds we call words. Most children are given much help and encouragement in building up these habits. Yet in forming certain other habits, no less important, they receive little help.

Take your own little child for example. You may be careful that he learns to stand straight and talk clearly and correctly. Are you equally careful that he learns to be even tempered, obedient, friendly with others, and speak the truth? During a child's early years, he is being molded into a character pattern. Parents can do a great deal in babyhood and early childhood to determine what this pattern shall be. Later they can do little.



Children Are Imitators

The child reflects to a high degree the habits of his father and mother. If he sees them even-tempered, calm, courteous, kind, fairminded, honest and courageous, he is likely to have these qualities. If, on the other hand, they fly off the handle, disagree violently, are unfair in dealing with him and with each other, lie to him and each other, and worry in his presence, he may follow their example. Some good general rules for fathers and mothers are these:

Be what you want your child to be.

Expect that he will do the right thing, and give him credit for it when he does.

Always keep your promises to him.

Do not show fear in his presence or suggest fears to him.

Never lose temper when correcting him.

Do not baby him.

Teach him to do things for himself, to be self-reliant and gradually more independent of his parents.

Recognize his wants, but do not give him everything he demands.

Respect him, his plans, his opinions. Remember that he is a person with real interests of his own.

Habits Good and Bad

Good habits for a child to acquire are:	*Habits to be prevented are:*
Eating cheerfully what is given him at meals.	Fussing about food.
Regular toilet habits.	Bedwetting.
Regular hours for sleep.	Nailbiting.
Self control.	Temper tantrums.
Obedience.	Lying.
Liking people.	Disobedience.
Courage.	Jealousy.
	Timidity.

How should a parent go about encouraging desirable habits and discouraging undesirable ones? The following suggestions may help answer this question.

How to Encourage Good Eating Habits

Serve meals as attractively as possible at a regular time. Act as though you enjoyed eating all kinds of foods and expected your child to do so. Make mealtime a pleasant time; avoid scolding or any disagreeable discussions at the table. Do not talk about the child's likes and dislikes before him. Never coax or try to force a child to eat. Give him 30 minutes for his meal. If it is not eaten then, take it away. Do not give him food between meals. Do not feed him when he is old enough to feed himself.

Preventing Temper Tantrums

First find out what is the cause of the outburst of bad temper. Sometimes more sleep is all that is needed. Many a child has been unjustly thought an ill-tempered child when he really was only a tired child. Improper food, overexcitement, and lack of play and exercise are other causes. Children want to be busy every waking minute. They need plenty of play as well as plenty of rest.

Some children develop the habit of flying into fits of bad temper as a means of attracting attention or of obtaining their desires. Never give in to a child or let him have what he wants during a temper spell. Ignore him when he loses his temper and make it clear that he gains nothing by it. Do not shout at him or show any anger. The more he loses his temper, the more important it is for you to keep yours.

Of course, the child is not always wrong, and the parent always right! Sometimes stubbornness on the part of the child is due to careless, harsh, or unfair handling by the parent.

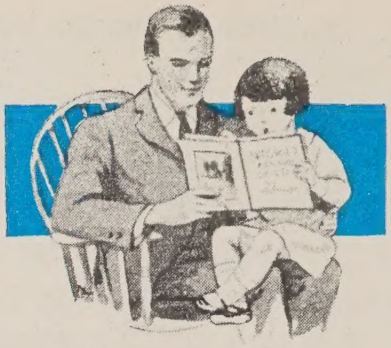
A healthy child should be full of energy. If you constantly scold and repress, there will be a short-circuiting of energy and a state of nerves. Above all, remember that the child is easily impressed and naturally given to imitation. If you exhibit fits of temper, the child will copy you.

Teaching Obedience

Training in obedience should start in the child's first weeks of life. Show a child quietly that obedience is expected. Never frighten, tease, or shame him into obeying. Do not bribe him. There are better ways. Make him understand that there are certain things he must do, and certain things he must not do. The intelligent child should expect reasons for your commands. Be sure you are right; then be firm. Try to understand what is in the child's mind, and what he thinks he is doing. Perhaps his idea is all right, but his method wrong or annoying. Do not lose your temper. If punishment is necessary, do not punish in anger; neither must you weaken. If the child deserves it, he should be punished, but he should know the reason why.

Truthfulness and Honesty

Some children with vivid imaginations indulge in more or less exaggeration. This must not be merely interpreted by overstrict parents as "fibbing"; it is one mark of a vigorous imagination, a valuable asset that the wise parent will turn into useful channels.



Deliberate lying is usually done to escape the consequences of misconduct. It is not enough, however, to punish the child for doing wrong and lying about it. One must seek motives. One must try to *know* the child.

A craving for sweets may lead a child to help himself from a forbidden shelf, or even to pilfer money for the purpose of buying candy. A regular candy ration, preferably a small piece after meals occasionally, will usually satisfy that craving. In some cases he wants these things, not for himself, but for his playmates. The desire to be host to others is a natural and worthy trait, and is easily kept within bounds by parents who are interested in the child, his playmates, and their play. Punishment for childish pilfering from pantry or purse will not meet the situation, but will tend rather to drive the child into attempting greater secrecy and deceit on the next occasion.

Again, some children are unruly or dishonest, because they feel neglected or ignored and want attention. Even the attention a "bad boy" gets seems better than no attention, to some children. The parent must see all sides of the question. The child must be made to realize that the wrong act will bring punishment; at the same time, the parent must understand the workings of the childish mind and must see that the punishment is just. Be a confidant

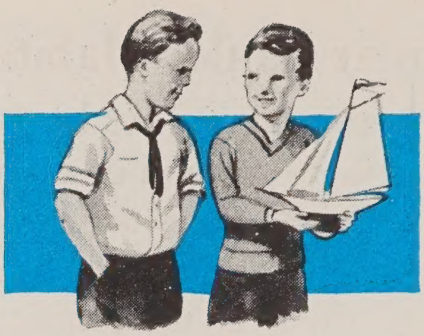
to your child, and he will come to you with his plans, desires and troubles.

There are unusual cases of persistent faulty conduct which can be traced to various defects, either mental or physical. If a child is given to chronic lying or thieving, he should have a thorough physical and psychological examination. It may be necessary for the parents to consult a mental specialist or a child guidance clinic.

Keeping Fears from Taking Root

A child is born with few, if any, fears. They are implanted in him by unpleasant experiences, by threats, by stories told to him, by the example of fearful, timid parents. Never read cruel or terrifying stories to young children at any time. Many of the old-time fairy stories were written for adults in the first place; some of them are not suitable for children. Consult persons who understand what the child needs in books and let them suggest stories of the right sort. Never threaten a child who has done wrong. Do not threaten him with witches, bogies, or wild animals. Do not suggest that thunder, lightning, or the dark is to be feared. It is utterly wrong to think that children inherit a fear of such things. If they are afraid of the dark, it is usually because they have been made to fear it by thoughtless adults.

Some children are afraid of anything new or strange. It is a mistake to push a child into a situation which frightens



him. For example, a child who fears the water should not be thrown in. He should be accustomed to it gradually. Many childhood fears can easily be explained away if parents will take the trouble to do so.

Overcoming Jealousy

A jealous child is usually a self-centered child. Jealousy may be attacked by encouraging a child to be interested in the welfare of others.

As early as possible in childhood a child should be shown how his own actions affect others. He should feel himself a part of a group with certain duties toward others. This group is gradually broadened. First it is his own family; then it includes his playmates, then schoolmates, then his community, and so on.

Parents can do much to prevent jealousy by being fair and impartial to all the children. Rarely hold up one child as a model to another. Do not praise one more than another. When a new baby is expected, tell the other children about it and let them have a pleasant feeling of responsibility for welcoming and helping the helpless new member of the family. This should help to prevent the development of jealousy toward a brother or sister.

Forming Regular Toilet Habits

By the time a child is 2 years old he should have regular toilet habits. If he wets his bed or clothing often, either he is not well or else he is in danger of forming a bad habit. The first thing to do is to take him to a doctor for an examination. If there is no physical cause for bed-wetting, then patient training is necessary. First, interest the child in overcoming the condition. Do not try to shame him, or humiliate him by talking about his difficulty before others. Make him feel he can overcome the tendency. You can help him by following these suggestions:

Give him simple food that is not highly seasoned.

Give him neither milk nor water after 5 o'clock at night.

See that he goes to the toilet the last thing before getting into bed.

Wake him later in the evening (always at the same hour) and have him go to the toilet.

Sex Instruction

The attitude your child forms toward sex when he is little is very important.

Answer him frankly and honestly when he asks where babies come from or shows curiosity about his body. If

you are evasive or make up fanciful stories or act embarrassed, he will stop asking you questions but will get the information he wants somewhere else. This information may be given to him in a very distorted form by other children or by some unhealthy-minded grown person. If you are puzzled to know how to explain the process of reproduction to a child or how to correct mistaken ideas on the subject, discuss the matter with your family physician or write to the American Social Hygiene Association at 50 West 50th Street, New York City.

The Child That Is Backward With His Lessons

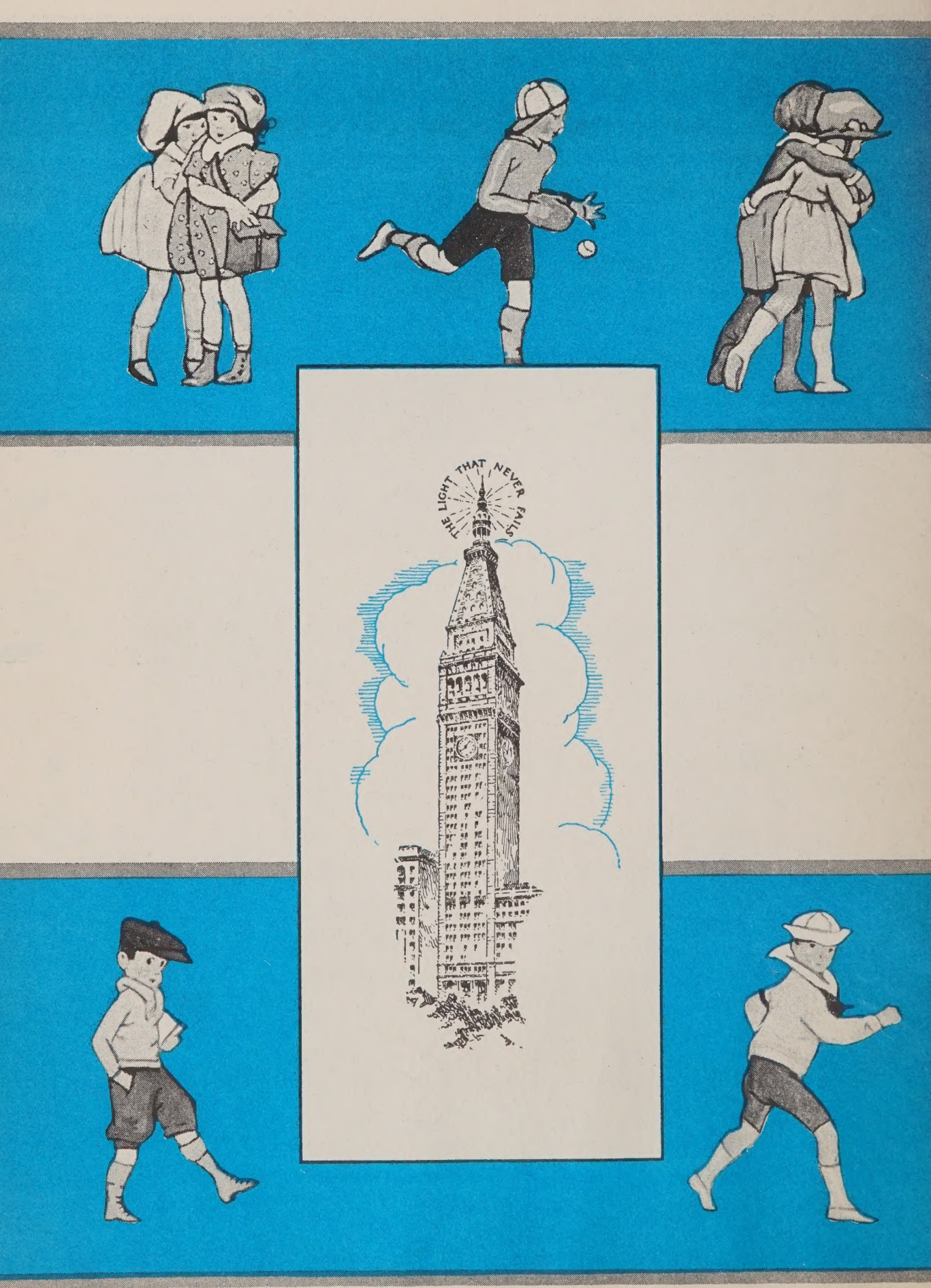
Backwardness, while usually the result of mental limitations or bad mental adjustments, may have its origin in physical troubles; diseased tonsils or adenoids; defects of hearing or sight; malnutrition; habitual mouth breathing. Any such physical causes should be removed at the earliest possible moment. Delay may mean years of trial for the child, to say nothing of the ill health involved. With physical handicaps attended to, full attention can be given to the child's educational or mental needs. Of course, even those children who enjoy full mental and physical health must not all be thought to have equal intelligence; indeed, two children of equal intelligence

may differ so greatly in their interests that their school records will disclose marked inequalities.

If a child is definitely and noticeably backward, early recognition of that fact is important, so that he may have special training. Fortunately, now, in the larger schools such children are assigned to special classes. In those classes, initiative is developed, the child progresses, and discouragement is avoided. Not infrequently special talents are developed and turned to very good use. The fact is recognized that attempts to push a child beyond his natural limits are not only useless, but dangerous, and may have a serious and lasting effect upon his mental health.

Wise parents will not jeopardize the child's health of mind in the pursuit of mental achievement; they know that there are other measures of success in life besides book learning.

For additional information and literature on the mental health of children and of adults, write to the National Committee for Mental Hygiene, 50 West 50th Street, New York City, or the Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene, with offices in Montreal and Toronto.



METROPOLITAN LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY PRESS
NEW YORK, U.S.A.
(d) 437 L.W.